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New York

President: Mr. Ping ..... (Gabon)

The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

Agenda items 35 and 47 (*continued*)

Culture of peace

Notes by the Secretary-General (A/59/201 and A/59/223)

Draft resolution (A/59/L.15)

Sport for peace and development: International Year of Sport and Physical Education

Report of the Secretary-General (A/59/268)

Draft resolution (A/59/L.9)

Mr. Menan (Togo) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to congratulate you warmly once again, Sir, on behalf of the delegation of Togo, on the outstanding way in which you are guiding this session of the General Assembly.

The promotion of a culture of peace is undoubtedly one of the international community's priority goals in the new millennium. That is because, in our ever-changing world, where peace is threatened and where ethical issues are of growing importance, the culture of peace offers present and future generations values that can help them to shape their destiny and to participate actively in building a fairer, freer and more prosperous society at the family, national, regional and global levels as they await the advent of a more peaceful world.

I should like, on behalf of the Togolese delegation, to congratulate the Secretary-General and, through him, the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for the reports that they have submitted to us, which detail the action taken by the United Nations system and Member States since the proclamation of the decade 2001-2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World. In that respect, we welcome the action and initiatives taken under the auspices of UNESCO since the proclamation of the Decade, and especially the role being played by the University for Peace, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the International Labour Organization and United Nations University.

At the initiative of the President of the Republic, Mr. Gnassingbé Eyadema, Togo has striven for several years to maintain a climate of peace and good understanding in Africa, and especially in the Western African subregion. The many actions undertaken by the Togolese Head of State — such as the adoption of the Agreement on Non-Aggression and Defence in Western Africa and his involvement in the settlement of several crises, including that in Côte d'Ivoire — demonstrate Togo's desire for peace to reign throughout the continent.

Among the actions undertaken at the international level that should be consolidated in the long term, we

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would briefly note certain examples that the Togolese delegation believes to be essential.

In certain parts of the world, such as Africa, the achievements of nation States created in artificially delineated geographical spaces must be resolutely consolidated. It is well known that those circumstances have weakened the sense of the peoples living in those spaces that they belong to the same national community. That phenomenon has assumed a new dimension, in particular, since the democratization process in Africa — which has sought to take account of the specificities of each people — was unfortunately blown off course by pressures from beyond the continent.

The inevitable consequence of all this is that the march towards democratization has been accompanied in most African countries by socio-political turbulence that has gravely unravelled the social fabric and undone post-independence efforts for national cohesion. Moreover, the current crises, tensions and conflicts in Africa — more often than not fratricidal — are also largely related to the accelerated march towards democratization undertaken by most African States.

Beyond the consolidation of the nation State, we believe that the effective management of post-conflict periods, especially in Africa, is another essential aspect of the promotion of a culture of peace. To that end, we must above all develop and enhance the efforts made in that regard by the United Nations system.

In that respect, we must promote the practice of ensuring that future peace agreements are more closely associated with the development of a culture of peace and that they include, first and foremost, national programmes on the culture of peace that will conduce to the implementation of sustainable development projects. Moreover, as affirmed in the Millennium Declaration, social justice and the elimination of poverty are essential to the establishment and maintenance of peace and security within and among nations. Similarly, as the United Nations Development Programme confirms in its wise proposals, human-centred development is both a prerequisite to peace and a consequence of it.

Thus, it is important to ensure that this other dimension — the elimination of poverty — be the object of special attention in the campaign to promote the culture of peace. Peace is not merely the absence of war; it is clear that it is also intimately linked to economic development.

Despite the efforts of African States to reform their economies and broaden their democratic space, they continue to face economic and financial difficulties that do not allow them to guarantee their people the bare minimum for survival. In certain cases, such as that of Togo, those difficulties are even exacerbated by the imposition of unjust economic sanctions on account of the so-called democratic deficit. Such coercive measures make the ideal of peace an even more distant prospect for their peoples.

Hence, any effort to abandon the culture of violence — as the Programme of Action of the International Decade and the activities undertaken in the framework of the dialogue of cultures and civilizations so eloquently confirmed — is undermined from the start by the fact that the populations concerned continue to live in total privation and are denied their fundamental rights. Therefore, interaction between the culture of peace and sustainable development remains the cornerstone of the enterprise to which the international community must henceforth devote itself.

The Secretary-General's reports stress not only the actions already undertaken, but also the need to pursue and strengthen them further in the future. We hope that States and the international community, armed with the necessary political will, will succeed in translating into reality the basic and legitimate aspirations of peoples to a world of peace and justice, free of misery and poverty.

Mrs. Chassoul (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me at the outset to thank you, Sir, for your excellent leadership of the work of the General Assembly.

On 31 July 1997, the representatives of Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, El Salvador, the Philippines, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, Namibia, Nicaragua, Panama, Senegal, Venezuela and Costa Rica called for the inclusion of an additional item on the agenda of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. That item was "Culture of peace".

The establishment of the United Nations system, based on universally shared values and objectives, was in itself an important step forward in the shift from a culture of war and violence to one of peace and non-

violence. The international instruments adopted under United Nations auspices and the declarations and plans of action that emerged from its world conferences have helped to enshrine the culture of peace and reflect the development and consolidation of shared norms, values and goals.

Abolishing war, which has become a worse scourge than ever before, must be pursued as the principal objective of humankind. That task requires not only changes in war's structures and institutional manifestations, but also replacing the deep cultural roots of the culture of violence and war with the culture of peace.

Global history attests to the dominance of the culture of war. For centuries, men have used weapons to resolve conflicts with their neighbours, be they internal or with other States. Regrettably, violence reigns in human relations and the events of recent years bear out that fact. We have learned here that the main areas for action to promote and strengthen the culture of peace are education, sustainable economic and social development, human rights, gender equality, democratic participation and the promotion of understanding, tolerance and solidarity.

Accordingly, the features of the culture of peace are non-violence and respect for human rights; respect and solidarity among all peoples; dialogue among cultures; linking peace with democratic participation and sustainable human development; the free dissemination of information and knowledge; containing and preventing conflicts; peace-building in post-conflict situations; and equality between men and women. All of those must be backed up by projects in which people actively participate in radically transforming their own values, attitudes and conduct.

While matters relating to human rights are an important component of the culture of peace, the concept of that culture also encompasses other issues of great significance. All States must strengthen the culture of peace. We must cooperate with international organizations, civil society, community leaders, parents, teachers at all levels of education, journalists and, in brief, everyone living on this Earth of ours.

The opportunity or ability to speak on the culture of peace reflects the aspiration to a world free from war and genuine awareness of the dangers we face.

Year after year, the General Assembly urges Member States to give impetus to their activities to promote a culture of peace and non-violence, extending them by its fifty-eighth session to national, regional and international plans. They have also been urged to work to promote peace and non-violence at all levels, recognizing that respect for and acceptance of religious and cultural diversity, tolerance, dialogue and cooperation in an atmosphere of trust and understanding can help in fighting discrimination, intolerance and hatred and thereby strengthen world peace, social justice and peaceful coexistence among peoples.

In conclusion, Costa Rica is a peace-loving country. Over 50 years ago, my country completely and unilaterally renounced the use of force and entrusted its security to international law and multilateral machinery for the peaceful settlement of disputes. Peace means harmony among the various sectors of society, balanced relationships among people and peoples, and the repudiation of violence and hatred in human relations.

Mr. Limon (Suriname): The delegation of Suriname would like to speak on item 47, entitled "Sport for peace and development: International Year of Sport and Physical Education".

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Barbados on behalf of the States members of the Caribbean Community.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report on the item, contained in document A/59/268. The report reiterates the important contribution that sport and physical education can make to achieving peace and development, in particular human development. The Government of Suriname agrees with that statement. We continue to support the objectives of the United Nations system for the International Year of Sport and physical Education in 2005.

Suriname is of the view that sport, peace and development need to be seen in a broader perspective. Their mutually reinforcing and supporting ability is being recognized by the international community. Sport has always been an important factor in bringing people together in peace, and physical education has always been an important means in the bringing-up of children in Surinamese communities and to increase tolerance and understanding among the different cultures and ethnic groups in Surinamese society.

We support the goal of creating interest in human development issues in the world of sport and the broadening of the perception of sport to encompass "sport for all". On the basis of those principles, the Government of Suriname will, in the year 2005, increase its activities in the area of youth sport and mass sport activities. Recreational and leisure activities will be available for participation by the public, offering everyone an opportunity to increase good health.

Actions are now being taken to bring sport and recreation closer to the community, especially the so-called working class neighbourhoods, the districts and the interior of Suriname. Those activities are aimed at the increased participation of youth, women and people with disabilities. We believe that they will assist in the furtherance of tolerance among the different cultures in Surinamese society and that Surinamese youth will be given additional opportunity to participate in physical activities and, in so doing, to display their talents for certain sports.

It is important to mention that, whenever we turn to sport, physical education and training, the overarching objective of the Surinamese Government is to prevent anti-social behaviour and to improve the quality of life. In harmony with its "sport for all" activities, the Government of Suriname will continue to pursue its "competition-tailored" sport agenda.

My delegation is of the view that the United Nations and the United Nations system are best suited to assist in defining and advancing the global sport agenda and to make the year 2005 a significant year for sport and physical education. We acknowledge the activities already undertaken by the United Nations system, in particular the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Sport for Development and Peace, and the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships.

The elaboration of an anti-doping convention in all sport activities is a relevant exercise that will result in a legal document that should contribute to enhancing fair competition and the meaning of competition sport.

We expect the International Year of Sport and Physical Education — the year 2005 — to make a difference in our perception and utilization of sport. As stated by the Secretary-General in his report,

> "The International Year of Sport and Physical Education in 2005 is intended to provide an opportunity to promote the value of sport as a serious partner for the achievement of development and peace goals." (*A/59/268, para. 29*)

Enhancing the significance of sport in order to enable it to make a meaningful contribution to international peace and development requires a global partnership with the participation of all, including the sport-related private sector, the international sport federations, the non-governmental organizations and grass-roots organizations. The United Nations system is deemed capable of uniting them all.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): At the outset, let me thank you once again, Sir, for your able stewardship and assure you of Israel's utmost cooperation. In addition, let me take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General and his staff for the work they have done in producing the useful and informative report before us.

Sports are indeed very powerful. Not only gauges of the limits of human potential, they can also be used to foster international friendship and harmony and to bridge the global seams of friction. They are, in fact, an international forum of their own. And now, as we approach the beginning of the International Year of Sport and Physical Education in 2005, we should be hopeful that the positive elements of sport will be the only ones that manifest themselves.

Anyone who remembers the "ping-pong diplomacy" of the early 1970s cannot help but believe in the potential of sport to help foster openness and international cooperation. "The ping heard around the world," as *Time* magazine called it then, was a sign of sport's ability to break though seemingly unbreachable barriers. Pursuant to resolution 58/5, the Secretary-General has urged Governments to give serious consideration to how sport could be more systematically included in plans to improve people's lives, especially those of children living in poverty or with disease or conflict.

Our troubled region has seen small glimmers of promise in that regard, and we are always hopeful that they are signs of the chances of a more peaceful era. For example, last year's Japanese-Israeli-Palestinian Children's Friendship Soccer Match, held in Tokyo,

hosted 11 Palestinian children and 11 Israeli children in a symbolic week of friendly, athletic activity.

I would also note this year's success of the Bnei Sakhnin football team, the first Israeli-Arab football team to win the Israeli Cup and, as a result, to represent Israel in the Union of European Football Associations Cup. As the Israel Football Association Chairman has said,

> "The coexistence shown here today should be an example to the rest of the world. A team which consists of Jews, Christians, Muslims and foreigners representing an Arab town could act as abridge for peace."

And as journalist Salem Joubran has said,

> "If Jews and Arabs can play together and win a cup, they can also do business together and simply live together."

Unfortunately, sport can sometimes be abused and made to serve as a sword as much as a shield. Regrettably, some would use the opportunities they present to work in diametric opposition to the goals we hold dear. For example, the Palestinian Authority continues to use sporting events to present terrorists as role models for youth. This past year, a youth sport gathering was named after Marwan Zalum, who was responsible for killing at least seven people, including an infant, and injuring dozens more in Jerusalem. The event was held under the authority of Yasser Arafat and his Ministry of Youth and Sport. Within the framework of a sporting event for young people, the Chairman of the corrupt Palestinian Authority's Legislative Council praised the terrorist and a film was shown about his life.

But the invidious subversion of sport reaches far beyond our region. For years, racism and anti-Semitism at European football games have been an increasingly disturbing phenomenon. That problem does not seem to have abated. On the contrary, in many football stadiums in Europe, neo-Nazi blocs use games to build contacts and recruit new members. Racist and anti-Semitic songs are employed and code words and signs are used to allude to xenophobic platforms. That is particularly disturbing in the context of the recent rise in anti-Semitism in Europe, as it serves as both a barometer and an aggravating factor of that despicable trend.

It is in that context that Israel commends the work of organizations that are working to combat those nefarious activities. Particular praise should go to Football Against Racism in Europe (FARE), which puts a tremendous amount of effort into building grass-roots efforts against racism in football. This week, FARE is engaging in its fifth annual Action Week, and Israel wishes it the heartiest success in its very worthwhile endeavours.

Perhaps the most important example of the capability of sport to reflect the world it comes from, both positively and negatively, is the Olympic Games. As the report states, "sport is about participation, inclusion and citizenship. It brings individuals and communities together, highlighting commonalties and bridging cultural and ethnic divides." (*A/59/268, para. 7*) The Olympic Games is the supreme expression of that, and it is in that context that my delegation would like to congratulate Greece on a tremendously successful and peaceful twenty-eighth Olympiad.

Israel is proud of its athletes' performance at the Olympics and of the feeling of international brotherhood manifested at this year's Games. Its only regret was the dismaying inability of certain countries, such as Iran, to put aside the irrational politics of hatred and to allow all athletes to compete in the spirit of international harmony and hope for which the Games were intended, instead of forcing them to obey immoral political agendas.

No matter how successful the holding of an Olympiad may be, it is always a time of lingering sadness for Israel. For the Israeli people, the very idea of the Olympics cleaves to the memory of the 1972 Games in Munich, when gunmen from the terrorist group Black September broke into the Olympic village, disguised as athletes, and killed 11 Israeli athletes, coaches and referees, violating the sanctity of the village and of the Olympic Truce. That heinous act of terror was the very antithesis of the Olympic ideal. Instead of avoiding politics and conflict, the terrorists used the games as yet another venue for murder and hatred. It was one of the most atrocious subjugations of sport to a set of morally bankrupt political desires within memory.

We cannot allow that tragedy, which mars the annals of the Games, to be forgotten. Thus, it is very disappointing that the International Olympic

Committee has not yet found an appropriate manner to officially observe the memory of the fallen Israeli athletes. If it wants to demonstrate that the concept of the Olympic Truce is not merely a wistful illusion, Israel calls on it to do so without fail.

As the report says, "Sport can cut across barriers that divide societies, making it a powerful tool to support conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts, both symbolically at the global level and practically within communities." (*ibid., para. 9*) Israel strongly endorses that proposition and calls on all countries to use the opportunities provided by sport to foster peace and development. Israel pledges to fully support that endeavour.

Ms. Pérez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The San Francisco Charter set the grounds of what should have been a new system of international relations that would avoid the terrible experiences of the two world wars of the twentieth century. The fundamental goal contained in its first paragraph is "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" and to achieve the creation of an equitable and democratic international order focused on respect for the dignity of all human beings as equals.

The Organization we belong to was created to serve the purposes of international security and peace-keeping based on the principles of sovereign equality for all its Members, the peaceful settlement of international conflicts, the non-use or threat of use of force, and non-intervention in States' internal affairs. We were also promised that all States would achieve economic and social development.

Nonetheless, with the approach of the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations, we are witnessing the rise of a sad economic and social situation threatening the human race. The foreign debt of the poor countries, accounting for $50 billion dollars in 1964, currently amounts to $2.6 trillion. In the 21 years from 1982 to 2003, the poor world paid $5.4 trillion in debt servicing, which means that the debt's current principal has been paid more than two-fold to the rich countries.

Official development assistance, to which developed countries committed 0.7 per cent of their gross national product 34 years ago, has only reached 0.22 per cent, which is less than a third.

More than 800 million people are starving. About 500 million children live in extreme poverty, more than 120 million do not attend school, around 150 million in the developing world suffer malnutrition, and 11 million under the age of five die each year of preventable diseases. Every day, 30,000 people die in developing countries because drugs, 90 per cent of which are under pharmaceutical transnational patents, are very expensive or unavailable. Approximately 3.1 million people suffering from AIDS are under the age of 15, yet only 1 per cent of infected Africans have access to retroviral medicines and some 6,000 youngsters between the ages of 15 and 24 are infected with that terrible disease each day.

Furthermore, the lives of million human beings on the planet are also threatened by the aggressive plans of the only super-Power in a unipolar world, which has arrogated the right to launch pre-emptive attacks against 60 or more developing countries and whose plans for domination are supported, among others things, by military satellites spying on every square kilometre of Earth, as well as by vast amounts of armaments, particularly nuclear weapons.

It is regrettable that most developed countries devote themselves to distorting conflict settlements, invoking their so-called responsibilities to protect and their supposed right to undertake humanitarian interventions, concepts that are contrary to the United Nations Charter and to international law and only aggravate the root causes of armed confrontations, which range the gamut from widespread poverty to the control of natural resources considered strategic.

Today more than ever, it is essential to foster an environment of international peace. It is indispensable to defend a culture of peace and non-violence that promotes dialogue among civilizations, the right of all peoples to self-determination, and solidarity as fundamental values wherewith to tackle global problems so that the responsibility to solve them is shared, meeting the needs of those who most require it.

In that sense, Cuba reiterates its adherence to multilateralism and multilaterally-agreed solutions, pursuant to the United Nations Charter and international law, as the only acceptable means to address international problems. Only in such a way can there be peace and development for all.

Our delegation supports the activities carried out within the framework of the International Decade for a

Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, as well as the global strategy for the implementation of its Programme Of Action.

For Cuba, sport and the Olympic ideal undoubtedly strengthen friendship and fraternity among peoples — indispensable components of the promotion of peace, development and cooperation among nations. Our contribution to that effort is based on a broad international cooperation programme implemented without consideration of gain not only in the field of sport, but also in the spheres of health care and education, by thousands of Cuban specialists and technicians who offer their services in solidarity with dozens of countries. They do so despite the strict economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed on our country by our powerful northern neighbours, whose current leaders have strengthened its intensity through the implementation since 30 June of a new plan to destroy the Cuban nation.

Let us plant ideas, and all the weapons created by this civilization will become obsolete. Let us plant ideas, and the irreparable destruction of our living natural environment may be prevented. Let us share the hope that a better world is possible.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the Observer of the Holy See.

Archbishop Migliore (Holy See): For many decades now, the need to promote an effective culture of peace has been widely acknowledged and, since 1967, the Popes, too, have played their part, sending a message on the first day of January every year to all people of good will, each time proposing a fresh theme concerning peace and how to achieve it. Those messages have already started to build up a mosaic of topics and experiences for the promotion of a culture of peace in the sense under discussion today.

It is very clear that the world needs peace now as much as ever. My delegation is pleased to seize this occasion to reiterate its confidence in the United Nations as one of the key institutions at mankind's disposal for the spread of a culture of peace.

As the Secretary-General mentions in his recent report on the work of the Organization, we need only consider the increase in United Nations peacekeeping operations during the past year. Similarly, this year has also seen the creation of a Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate in the struggle to uphold and protect human rights and the rule of law. With the necessary cooperation from all its Members, the United Nations can truly be an effective instrument of the political will of the world's nations.

In spite of those successes and initiatives, such as the goals of globalization within the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World — the usually more dominant culture appears sometimes to trigger cultural reactions against true peace and to create suspicions about it. Similarly, globalization seems unable to prevent threats to peace because cultural revivalism tends to create walls that separate people from one another. Cynicism emerges from misunderstandings among peoples that are the results of unnecessary barriers. The concept of security itself has come to create a continuing tension between national, international and global security interests.

To address the problems of security at any cost, all labours toward authentic peace must be nurtured unceasingly, balancing threat-based with cooperative security interests. The defence of peace, so often a fragile entity, must be reinforced. That can be achieved by cultivating in the minds of all people of good will the imperative to become in some way agents of peace. Making peace a reality is possible through the education of consciences that an openness and respect for others can produce.

At its fifty-eighth session, the General Assembly considered resolutions on the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, on the University of Peace, and on religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation. All three are vital elements of building peace in the world, but the last item warrants special attention today. We agreed in last year's resolution that "acts of violence, intimidation and coercion motivated by religious intolerance... are on the increase in many parts of the world and threaten the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms" (*resolution 58/128, eleventh preambular paragraph*).

Nonetheless, we have to acknowledge that there is already a foundation to build upon in the area of inter-religious cooperation — for example, the various meetings organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Central Asia,

the Mediterranean region, both North and West Africa and the Asia-Pacific region. Those discussions have covered such areas as terrorism, conflict resolution, HIV/AIDS, and the role of religious leaders in easing tensions, in counteracting the hijacking of religious values for use as a pretext to justify violence, and in supporting disarmament and non-proliferation.

The devastating effects of conflict usually last generations, making reconciliation and any semblance of normal life extremely difficult, if not impossible. Although there has been much focus on weapons of mass destruction, we cannot ignore the many other forms of weapons used in conflicts around the world. Here, in this discussion, the Holy See raises this point in order to call for a more energetic commitment to underlining the deep linkages between the promotion of the culture of peace and the strengthening of the disarmament and non-proliferation process.

While it is true that the other name of peace is authentic development for all peoples, my delegation also believes that an important engine of that peace is political will. Harnessing it will greatly assist this Assembly in moving forward from the imputed perception of being a mere forum for analysis or a resolution-making machine into a real locus for the cultivation of transparency and the building-up of confidence. With political will, the untapped moral resources of nations can emerge to transform civilizations so that, finally, they learn to treasure life and promote peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I wish to inform the General Assembly that, at the request of its sponsors, the Assembly will take a decision on draft resolution A/59/L.15 at a later date.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/59/L.9, entitled "Sport as a means to promote education, health, development and peace", as orally revised.

I wish to inform the Assembly that, since the draft resolution's submission, the following countries have become co-sponsors: Andorra, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malta, Myanmar, Peru, San Marino, Suriname, the United Arab Emirates and Uruguay.

May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to adopt draft resolution A/59/L.9, as orally revised?

Draft resolution A/59/L.9, as orally revised, was adopted (resolution 59/10).

The President (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 35.

May I take it that General Assembly decides to conclude its consideration of agenda item 47?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 40

Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children

Report of the Secretary-General (A/59/274)

The President (*spoke in French*): Members will recall that, on Monday 25 October 2004, at the fourth informal meeting of the General Committee, which was open to all Member States, Mr. Olara Otunnu, Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, gave an informative and enlightening briefing on the topic of children and armed conflict in order to enhance our consideration of this item.

Mr. Hamburger (Netherlands): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The candidate countries Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro; and the European Free Trade Association countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

At the special session on children in May 2002, we committed ourselves to a Declaration and Plan of Action with the promising title "A world fit for children". We also agreed to look into the progress and achievements of the goals outlined in the Plan of Action by including this item on the agenda of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly. The European Union welcomes the present review, as it attaches great importance to the agreed concrete and action-oriented goals in the outcome document. It is our responsibility and duty to translate those goals into actions.

The end review of the World Summit for Children showed that progress in creating a better world for children has been unequal. Millions of children still

live in abject poverty, deprived of growing up in dignity and of access to education and other essential services that could have offered them opportunities to make a future of their own. Poverty is the main bottleneck in the realization of children's rights. Poverty eradication is therefore at the heart of the development strategies adopted by the European Union and we believe that creating a world fit for children is creating an enabling environment that has an impact on the lives of children and their families. In implementing our overarching policies on poverty alleviation, we focus on children by mainstreaming the gender and human rights, including children's rights, set forth in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The European Union acknowledges the fact that many Governments have addressed the four priority areas in "A world fit for children" in their poverty reduction strategies and that progress has been achieved, notably in the areas of basic education, health, water and sanitation. However, there is concern that few of the poverty reduction strategies place significant focus on child protection.

The European Union attaches great importance to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, which provide a comprehensive normative framework for our policies in promoting and protecting children's rights, including in crises situations. The European Union welcomes the fact that the Committee on the Rights of the Child has produced general comments on a number of important themes, such as on adolescent health and on HIV/AIDS, thereby giving guidance to States parties as to the implementation of the provisions of the Convention and its Optional Protocols. We believe that this will help in developing and implementing child-focused policies in the priority areas that are highlighted in the Plan of Action of the outcome document. We welcome the fact that children's rights are integrated into the work of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organization and other relevant organs of the United Nations. The European Union calls upon all entities of the United Nations system to continue working towards an integrated response. Close coordination of respective activities remains vital.

The European Union's commitment to the cause of children is reflected in its policies, as well as in its efforts in developing partnerships and in mobilizing resources to promote children's rights through the European Union and its member States' budgets. That approach is illustrated by the extensive input provided to the formulation of the European Union Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict by a range of children's rights entities — including UNICEF, Save the Children and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict — and the cooperation on children's rights training that is being pursued by UNICEF and the European Commission.

In that regard, States parties' national plans of action for children are important instruments to put in place mechanisms for meaningful partnerships, the allocation of resources, partnerships, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The European Union therefore calls upon States parties that have not yet done so to prepare or strengthen national action plans with a set of specific time-bound and measurable goals and targets. In so doing, they should cooperate with civil society actors, including the non-governmental organizations working for and with children, as well as with children themselves.

It is important to involve children, as they have the right to be taken into account in matters affecting their own lives. They have the right to play an active role and to express their opinions in the community and society, not only on specific plans of action and programmes for children, but also on all programmes that affect their lives. We recognize the need to ensure that all children and young people are included without discrimination on the grounds of disability, gender, ethnic origin, social status or any other cause, and to make particular efforts to ensure that all children and young people benefit from development programmes.

I would like to focus briefly on two priority areas that are highlighted in the Plan of Action of the outcome document. One is providing quality education; the other is combating HIV/AIDS.

The European Union is convinced that education, especially of girls and women, is central for poverty reduction, the achievement of sustainable development and the construction of democratic, prosperous societies. The European Union reaffirms its strong commitment to the Education for All (EFA) goals and to the second and third Millennium Development Goals on achieving universal primary education by 2015 and eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005. We therefore urge all

States to take all necessary measures to eliminate obstacles to the full realization of the right to education, with particular emphasis on the education of girls.

Addressing the gender gap should be a key policy priority in the education plans of Governments for improving access and quality. Considering the necessity to increase funds and to improve the quality of education interventions, the European Union supports the EFA Fast Track Initiative as an evolving global partnership of developing and donor countries and agencies to support global EFA goals. The European Union underlines the need for education to be protected and restored in conflict and post-conflict periods. It considers education to be a key component of crisis-related policies and of reconstruction programmes. The European Union calls on all States to pay special attention to the impact of HIV/AIDS on education systems and the role education can play in confronting HIV/AIDS vigorously and to take the appropriate measures to reinforce action in that area. Achieving the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education requires special attention to the needs of marginalized groups of children and young people who are excluded from education, including those with disabilities, orphans and other children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS, and other disadvantaged groups.

I wish to say a few more words on combating HIV/AIDS. Across the world, nearly 14 million children have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS and their numbers will nearly double to 25 million by the end of the decade. Moreover, millions have been made vulnerable by the disease, as HIV/AIDS both thrives on and exacerbates other challenges, including poverty, armed conflict and gender discrimination. It rolls back decades of progress in child survival. The European Union calls upon all States to take immediate and necessary measures — policies and programmes alike — to respond to the needs of millions of children orphaned or affected by HIV/AIDS and their caretakers.

There is an urgent need to massively scale up assistance and mobilize partnerships with the international donor community and national Governments. The rapid delivery of resources is urgently needed. The European Union reaffirms its commitment to combating HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. It welcomes the activities of the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and encourages specific attention for children infected and affected by HIV/AIDS in developing countries. It recognizes the role of older people in caring for children orphaned or affected by HIV/AIDS and the need to include them in poverty reduction programmes. Relevant also is the need to ensure that young people have access to accurate information, education and services to promote sexual and reproductive health, and especially to help them to avoid HIV infection.

As we said in our statement to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, sexual and reproductive health and rights are essential in the fight against HIV and AIDS, poverty and maternal and child mortality. The rights of young people concerning their own sexual and reproductive health are still too frequently ignored or overlooked. We again acknowledge the important work carried out by UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund in creating awareness of and increased access to information and services for young people and adolescents.

Finally, while acknowledging all the good work that has been done so far, we have to remain focused on the need to ensure that the follow-up to the outcome of the special session will bring about genuine improvement in the lives of children. It is not about us reviewing year after year how much progress we have made. It is about them and about how much of a future they have.

Mr. Hackett (Barbados): On behalf of the States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Members of the United Nations, I have the honour to make this statement on agenda item 40, "Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children", which seeks to provide the perspective of CARICOM countries on that issue.

I would first like to thank the Secretary-General for his report in document A/59/274 on the follow-up to the United Nations special session on children, which was held in May 2002. The report comprehensively outlines the progress made and the areas requiring further action in realizing the commitments set out in the document "A world fit for children".

The future survival of humankind depends in large part on how we now can implement policies to safeguard and nurture our children. In that connection, the 2002 special session on children was historic in

many respects, but particularly so since close to 190 countries adopted the Declaration and Plan of Action. It is also to be noted that the international community overwhelmingly supported the Convention on the Rights of the Child, rendering it the most powerful human rights instrument for children.

CARICOM countries have placed great focus on the implementation of the Plan of Action to achieve the set of goals for children and young people that are an integral part of the Declaration — promoting healthy lives, promoting quality education, protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence, and combating HIV/AIDS.

CARICOM Governments, in fulfilment of their commitment to creating a world fit for children, took immediate steps after the special session to formulate a regional strategy. That led to the endorsement of the CARICOM regional framework for action by the CARICOM Council of Ministers for Human and Social Development, which provides the basis for the implementation of the strategy. CARICOM very much appreciates the support provided by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to national Governments, as well as to the CARICOM regional secretariat, in that work.

In addition, virtually all CARICOM countries have started the preparation of national plans of action for children, and a few have even completed them. This indicates that priority issues for children are being reflected in the national planning processes within our region. What is particularly noteworthy is the fact that there was a broad consultative process in the development of those national plans of action, involving not only Government agencies, but also civil society and international and regional organizations.

The evolution of Caribbean societies is currently at a phase in which almost two thirds of their populations are under the age of 30. That phenomenon presents both opportunities and challenges for national and regional development and helps to explain why this agenda item is of particular importance to CARICOM countries. Indeed, we believe that young people have to play a significant role in the continuing building and maintenance of our stable and democratic societies. It therefore becomes essential that their assets be harnessed. Significant investments have been made in most of the CARICOM countries to ensure that children get a good start on life with a view to attaining the goals of the Plan of Action. Efforts in the region continue to build on lessons learned and shared experiences from other countries.

On the first goal of promoting healthy lives, nearly all CARICOM countries have immunization programmes in place, which contributes to higher figures on child survival rates. The second goal of protection against abuse, exploitation and violence is proving to be more challenging, as incidences in all three areas continue unabated. CARICOM countries have, however, committed themselves to improving standards for child protection.

Regarding the goal of providing quality education, CARICOM member States view education as an investment in human resources and as a means towards achieving economic and social development. Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which speaks explicitly to the responsibility of States to make education accessible to all children, has been given special attention by the countries of the region. Thus it will be found that, throughout the region, boys and girls alike are entitled to free primary and secondary education and, in some cases, tertiary as well.

On the issue of combating HIV/AIDS, we do share the view of the Secretary-General that the HIV/AIDS epidemic is a massive and increasing disaster for children. Similarly to the global situation, a large number of Caribbean children under the age of 15 are either infected with the HIV virus or living with AIDS. Additionally, the high incidences of infection are orphaning many children. Another aspect of the disease in the region has been the high level of mother-to-child transmission. For CARICOM countries, the spectre of HIV/AIDS destroying one of our greatest resources — our children and youth — is daunting. The Governments of the region, however, have responded with a focus on prevention and treatment programmes. All member States now have national AIDS programmes and Governments strive to allocate additional financial resources to fight HIV/AIDS.

Although CARICOM countries are making good progress in the attainment of the goals of the Plan of Action, there remain significant challenges in a number of areas. For example, there still exists in many of our countries a weak national statistical capacity, particularly in accessing disaggregated data on the priority areas of the Plan of Action. In that regard,

CARICOM countries welcome the initiative of UNICEF to develop a new round of multiple indicator cluster surveys that will provide data for reporting on progress towards the child-related Millennium Development Goals, as well as the goals of "A world fit for children". We certainly hope that UNICEF will include the countries of the Caribbean subregion in those indicator cluster surveys.

Another major challenge is the problem of youth, crime and violence in our societies. We certainly need to do more to invest in the period of adolescence in trying to combat the increasing incidence of violence and sexual abuse. In that regard, CARICOM countries will seek to adopt a process that is more inclusive of children and young people themselves in all phases of follow-up processes at the national and regional levels.

Another challenge is the fact that the current level of available resources is proving to be inadequate and there is a need for significant increases in financial resources to fund programmes. Indeed, it is indisputable that the global targets we have set require further financial assistance and fresh, new approaches. CARICOM member States therefore call for a recommitment to the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, particularly the targets for domestic and international resource mobilization and investment in basic social and economic infrastructure, health, education and social security programmes that pay special attention to children. Developing countries need concrete action and support to make the targets of the Plan of Action a reality. We believe that the world's children cannot wait any longer for action to be taken.

In closing, we recognize that the obstacles to realizing the rights of children in the twenty-first century are daunting, but fortunately, as the Secretary-General has correctly pointed out in his report,

> "The goals of 'A world fit for children' are benefiting from the widespread support among Governments and international agencies for the Millennium Development Goals" (*A/59/274, para. 94*),

for a number of the Millennium Development Goals directly address the rights of children. Indeed, it can be argued that, since children represent one of the most vulnerable groups in society, the first Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty by the year 2015 is unlikely to be realized unless the problems of children are successfully addressed.

Recognizing that reporting on the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action is key to determining the progress that is being achieved, CARICOM countries remain committed to preparing national and subregional reports, particularly in 2006, in time for the commemorative plenary meeting scheduled for 2007. As I indicated earlier, CARICOM looks forward to the support of international organizations, particularly UNICEF, in helping the countries of the region in the collection and retrieval of the vital information necessary for the conduct of the required in-depth reviews.

Mr. Zhang Yishan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his second annual report under agenda item 40, contained in document A/59/274. The report gives quite a comprehensive account of the progress achieved at the country level over the past year in the follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children. It identifies existing difficulties and problems and offers recommendations.

The Chinese delegation also notes that, of the 190 countries involved in the formulation of the Plan of Action and the text of "A world fit for children", 170 have either taken or intend to take action. That marks a very auspicious beginning.

The Chinese Government has always attached great importance to the development of children. In the 1990s, the Chinese Government formulated and implemented a decade-long national programme of action for childhood development. In May 2001, the Chinese Government promulgated the national programme of action for childhood development for the period 2001-2010, identifying development goals in the four areas of health, education, legal protection and environment. Those goals conformed to the global objectives for children's development, as specified at the special session on children, and took fully into account the current situation in the development and needs of Chinese children.

The implementation of the national programme of action has already become an important component of the follow-up to the special session. The regional and local Governments in China have drafted a series of policies and implementation programmes for the realization of the goals established at the special session and provided the necessary human and financial resources to further advance that process.

Since its inception in 1990 as the focal point of children's development, the National Working Committee on Children, working under the auspices of the State Council of China and consisting of representatives of 32 Government departments and social groups, has made significant efforts to promote the implementation of the law on the protection of minors, the law on compulsory education, the law on the protection of the rights and interests of women, the law on maternal and infant health care, and other legislation on the protection of the rights and interests of women and children so as to advance the implementation of the national programmes of action for women's and childhood development, while strengthening the lead role of Government at all levels and departments concerned in work relating to women and children and in promoting international exchanges and cooperation in that regard.

The largest non-governmental organization in China, the All China Women's Federation, focuses as always on issues relating to children, such as their rights, protection, education, health, participation and development. Since the special session on children, the All China Women's Federation has incorporated the moral and ethical education of minors into its overall work and provided guidance on family education. It has focused great attention on vulnerable groups of children and striven earnestly to protect children's legitimate rights and interests. It has prioritized girls and their growth so as to lay sound foundations for their future development. It has also mobilized extensive social resources to provide assistance to children in need.

We have made a good beginning of our implementation of the national programme of action for child development as a follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children. However, we continue to face a wide range of problems and challenges in child development in China as a result of numerous constraints, including the level of social and economic development. For example, in poor regions child development continues to lag behind, the rights and interests of children's groups lack full guarantees and juvenile delinquency is on the rise.

In the light of those problems, the Chinese Government is taking active and effective steps to address them, while vigorously developing its economy to eradicate poverty and to build a solid foundation for the realization of children's rights. We are also in the process of formulating a series of intervention policies, including ongoing projects aimed at compulsory education in poor regions, financial aid for needy students, equal schooling opportunities for migrant children and legal assistance for minors.

Since the special session on children was convened more than two years ago, encouraging progress has been made in carrying out follow-up activities on a global scale. However, we must be fully aware of two major obstacles to child development throughout the world: poverty and a scarcity of resources. Poverty not only deprives children of what they need, but also makes it difficult to sustain the gains achieved. The mounting threats to children's well-being, such as HIV/AIDS, conflict and instability, all have poverty as their root cause. In addition, the lack of resources — particularly the scarcity of resources at the disposal of developing countries for social development — limits child development.

We hope that the international community will continue to undertake efforts aimed at supporting child development. In that context, we appeal to the developed countries to increase their official development assistance, to increase the proportion of that assistance for children and to assume greater international responsibility for child development in developing countries. At the same time, we hope that UNICEF will play an increasingly coordinated role within the United Nations system in the area of child development.

China will, as always, continue to take an active part in international cooperation on child development with a view to promoting the survival, protection, development and participation of children and creating a better future for them.

Ms. Mogaka (Kenya): My delegation has the honour to participate in the debate on this important issue, namely, follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his report on the status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/59/190).

My delegation welcomes the adoption in April by the Commission on Human Rights of its resolution 2004/48 on the rights of the child. That resolution is timely, as it addresses general topics of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other instruments — protection and promotion of the rights

of the child; non-discrimination; protection and promotion of the rights of children in particularly difficult situations; the prevention and eradication of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; and recovery. My delegation recognizes the efforts of the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Carol Bellamy, in pursuit of the well-being of the world's children.

Kenya has signed and ratified the Convention and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Kenya has also signed the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

The Government of Kenya enacted a comprehensive Children's Act in March 2002. By passing that legislation, the Government undertook to put in place safeguards for the realization of the rights promoted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Indeed, the Government has embarked on a very comprehensive programme to implement the Act. A family court has been established to promote the welfare of the family as the custodian of children's rights. That is in line with the Committee's recommendation that Member States bring their legislation, policies, programmes and juvenile justice systems in line with the Committee's requirements and the rules of other relevant legal instruments.

In the education sector, the Government declared, in January 2003, free and compulsory primary education. That has increased enrolment in primary schools by more than 1 million. Although that in turn has put considerable strain on our educational facilities, we are grateful to our development partners who continue to support the Government in that worthy cause. In addition, a national reproductive health programme has been established to ensure the optimum health of our children from conception. Together with our adolescent reproductive health strategy, gender policy and youth policy, the Government has put programmes in place to ensure that our children's needs are met at all levels of development.

As the Assembly is aware, the HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to ravage the African continent. The effects of HIV/AIDS on family life are devastating. Orphaned children are left without parental love and security. Often, they are also sick and are forced to drop out of school. In order to address those issues, the Government of Kenya is committed to policies aimed at improving the general welfare of children. Those include, inter alia, building and strengthening governmental, family and community capabilities to provide a palliative environment for orphans and those affected by HIV/AIDS; ensuring access to school, shelter and good health; and protecting orphans and vulnerable children from all forms of abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination and loss of inheritance.

In addition, a national policy on orphaned children will be finalized by the end of this year. The policy will ensure that orphans are not discriminated against and that they enjoy full human rights. While the Government will continue to enhance respect for children's rights and to improve their welfare, there is concern that the burden of external debt keeps increasing at a time when official development assistance is decreasing, thus reducing Kenya's capacity for greater investment in the provision of basic social services for its children.

A wise man once said that the birth of a child is God's way of showing that He has not given up on the world. Yet, when one looks at the situation of many of the world's children — particularly those in areas of armed conflict — the violence and abuse meted out to these innocent victims is disheartening. My delegation therefore wishes to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for establishing the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to address critical issues pertaining to children affected by armed conflicts. We commend the good work carried out over the years by the Special Representative, Mr. Olara Otunnu, and by his Office. We also wish to thank him for the report he has prepared on this item and for the informative briefing he gave two days ago outlining the role of his Office.

We note with satisfaction that the work of the Office has resulted in greater visibility and advocacy of this issue and that a comprehensive body of norms has been put in place to protect children in armed conflict. In addition, the issue of children's protection has been included in various peace accords. Despite all that, many parties to conflicts continue to disregard those standards, often with impunity. My delegation welcomes the mainstreaming of the issue currently taking place in the United Nations and its agencies, and we concur with the appeal of the Special Representative with regard to the need to create a

political and social climate that will make the abuse of children unacceptable.

We support the deployment of child protection advisers in peacekeeping missions and the training of peacekeeping personnel in children's protection and child rights. As a major troop-contributing country and as the host of scores of young victims of armed conflict, Kenya supports initiatives aimed at the pre-deployment training of peacekeepers serving in regional and United Nations peace operations.

My delegation is of the view that strengthening subregional initiatives to end practices that are harmful to children, including the illicit exploitation of natural resources and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, as well as the cross-border recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, should be of paramount importance to all concerned.

Finally, we welcome the emphasis placed on supporting local institutions and regional networks whereby indigenous norms and values for the protection of women and children will be utilized, together with international judicial norms, to ensure local ownership and long-term sustainability. We will continue to support the United Nations in its efforts to put an end to the climate of impunity in which crimes are committed against children in the context of armed conflict. In this regard, all parties responsible for crimes against children should be brought to justice.

Mr. Mabhongo (South Africa): We are honoured to deliver this statement under agenda item 40. South Africa would like to associate itself with the statement made by Namibia in the Third Committee under agenda item 103 on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Group.

My delegation welcomes the comprehensive report by the Secretary-General on the follow-up to the General Assembly's special session on children in 2002. The report's focus on progress achieved in realizing the commitments set out in the outcome document of the special session, entitled "A World Fit for Children", assists in identifying problems and constraints and makes invaluable recommendations on actions needed to achieve further progress.

The African Union's African Common Position, entitled "Africa Fit for Children", was presented at the special session on children. As more than half of Africa's population consists of children and young people, we aptly stated in our Common Position that the future of our continent lies in the well-being of our children and youth. The prospects for the socio-economic transformation of Africa depend upon the investment in its young people. Today's investment in children is tomorrow's peace, stability, democracy and sustainable development. In that context, it is only by providing young Africans with health care, education and confidence in a bright future that we will achieve our goals of social and economic development.

Consequently, all States Members of the United Nations adopted the Declaration and Plan of Action entitled "A World Fit for Children" at the historic special session. We committed ourselves to time-bound goals for children and young people, with a particular focus on promoting healthy lives, providing quality education, protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence, and combating HIV/AIDS. The four major goal areas of the document entitled "A World Fit for Children" strongly reinforce the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals, seven of which directly address and affect the rights of children. Therefore, the agenda item on "A World Fit for Children" is closely linked with international efforts to ensure sustainable social and economic development and to mobilize additional resources for much-needed investments in the health, education and protection of children with a view to contributing to broad-based poverty reduction and socio-economic progress.

Although progress has been made on the continent to integrate the goals of the special session into national poverty-reduction strategies and national plans of action on children, much more needs to be done. According to an advocacy and policy publication released this year, entitled *The Young Face of NEPAD*, Africa accounts for only 12 per cent of the world's population, yet has 43 per cent of the world's child deaths, 50 per cent of the world's maternal deaths, 70 per cent of those living with HIV/AIDS and a staggering 90 per cent of the world's children orphaned by HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, Africa's children are caught up in conflicts and are victims of violence, trafficking and sexual and commercial exploitation.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is regarded as an important vehicle for delivering on our international commitments to children and ensuring the sustainability of their rights. NEPAD calls for bold leadership and for partnerships

between African Governments and their citizens and between Africa and the international community. The rights and welfare of children and the participation of young people should be central to these partnerships and to leadership if we are to honour our commitments already made.

Our regional and subregional structures — the African Union and the Southern African Development Community — are playing an important role in maintaining political support for the goals of the special session and in monitoring progress throughout member countries. For example, the African Union and UNICEF are collaborating to establish a database on child-related indicators for Africa, and a first monitoring report on the state of Africa's children has been prepared. My delegation supports the recommendation that such mechanisms can be further utilized to facilitate the intercountry exchange of experience and good practices in child-related programmes.

South Africa's National Programme of Action for Children was developed following its ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Child in 1995. This has effectively mainstreamed issues affecting the lives of our children. It commits all spheres of government to efforts in this area and ensures that the rights of children remain on the agenda of the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. The National Programme is coordinated by the Office of the Rights of the Child in the presidency. This coordinating and monitoring body works in partnership with Government departments and international agencies such as UNICEF, as well as with civil society.

In recent years there has been significant progress in developing and strengthening the system of social assistance — South Africa's key instrument for direct poverty relief. By April 2004, my Government had surpassed its target of registering 3 million children for the child support grant. South Africa has made improvements with regard to social security by increasing the eligibility age of the child support grant to 14 years over the next three years, as a way of progressively realizing and prioritizing children's socio-economic rights as enshrined in our constitution.

Equal opportunities and access to quality education is pivotal to all children in South Africa. In this regard, the South African Schools Act promotes access, quality and democratic governance in the schooling system. It ensures that all learners have access to quality education without discrimination, and makes schooling compulsory for children aged seven to 15. The Act's provision for democratic school governance through school governing bodies is in place in public schools countrywide. The school funding norms outlined in the Act prioritize redress and target poverty in funding allocations to the public schooling system.

In conclusion, we remain committed to the priorities outlined in the "World Fit for Children" document, and have organized our programmes to ensure that they are in line with the aspirations of all of our children. One of the main priorities of South Africa is service delivery to children. Much has been achieved in this realm, but much more needs to be done. In order for services to be delivered, policies and programmes must be implemented. South Africa's National Programme of Action is well placed to ensure that such implementation takes place. The Government of South Africa will accelerate service delivery to children. We will strengthen our resolve to do more for our children.

My delegation therefore wishes to take this opportunity fully to commit itself to the creation of a world fit for our children.

Ms. Hull (United States of America): The United States is pleased to speak on the follow-up to the United Nations special session on children. As we noted at the time of the special session on children in 2002, it represented great hope for children around the world. The session resulted in a strong consensus that, for both moral and practical reasons, we need to put children first. We salute the outstanding leadership of UNICEF on children's issues and its courageous efforts to embody its mission statement to help children meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. Indeed, this is the mission that all of us should adopt and implement in our national capacities.

The United States today reaffirms its commitment to work for children's well-being everywhere. In this, the tenth anniversary of the Year of the Family, we remind delegates that a stable, loving family environment is the best investment in children. As UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy notes, the family is a child's first line of protection.

The world today is confronted by political, economic, and security opportunities and challenges

that children in the twenty-first century must meet. How can we help ensure that our children will be ready?

We see three tracks that, when connected and acted upon simultaneously, will give our children the resources and the capacity to succeed. These are leading by example at home, engaging with the United Nations and supporting other international efforts.

As to leading by example at home, if we, the international community, aspire to better lives for our children, we each must support our own families and communities at home. Protecting children and strengthening families is a core concern of the United States. As President Bush has said, the safety and well-being of our children is a shared priority for all Americans, as well as for federal, state, and local authorities.

In the United States, we have strengthened mechanisms for monitoring children's web sites on the Internet. have strengthened laws against child pornography. We have also given law enforcement new tools to prevent, investigate, and prosecute violent crimes against children, and we are increasing punishment for federal crimes against children. We are nationally expanding and coordinating an alert system that notifies the public about child abductions, and our President has signed a Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act to help states promote adoption for children in foster care and to provide post-adoptive support to families.

The second track concerns engaging with the United Nations. Diarrhoea alone kills the equivalent of a jumbo-jet full of children every 4 hours. Contaminated water, unsanitary living conditions, water shortages, and poor hygiene kill 2 million children each year. Yet another 2 million children die because they lack access to immunization. And while dramatic progress has been made in reducing child deaths, almost 10 million still die each year, with almost 4 million of those deaths occurring in the first 28 days of life.

In the face of that continuing tragedy, the United States Agency for International Development has teamed up with UNICEF, the World Health Organization, the World Bank, The Canadian International Development Agency and other developing country, multilateral and bilateral partners, non-governmental organizations and the Gates Foundation to form a new alliance called the Global Child Survival Partnership. Together, through global attention and action, we want to improve child health and save children from dying of preventable causes. We commend Ms. Shahida Azfar, Interim Director of the Partnership, for her leadership.

With respect to the third track, support for other international efforts, global partnerships are critical to win the fight against the modern-day slavery of trafficking in human beings. International cooperation has helped prosecute nearly 8,000 perpetrators of trafficking worldwide, resulting in more than 2,800 convictions last year. Since 2001, the United States Government has provided more than $295 million to support antitrafficking programmes in 120 countries. We have launched Operation Predator to safeguard children from paedophiles, human traffickers, international sex tourists and Internet pornographers. We have secured a commitment from the travel and tourism industry to develop a code of conduct to prevent the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism.

Eight thousand people — including thousands of children — will die today of HIV/AIDS, and many more will be infected. President Bush is leading the international campaign to control this pandemic through the Emergency Plan for HIV/AIDS, which will provide $15 billion over five years in a multifaceted approach. Not only does the Emergency Plan focus on 15 targeted countries in Africa, the Caribbean and South-East Asia, but our Government also has bilateral agreements with over 100 other nations.

One pillar of the Emergency Plan is providing care to 10 million AIDS orphans and people living with HIV/AIDS. In the first 18 months of the Initiative to Prevent Mother to Child Transmission, 378,000 women received services and an estimated 4,800 children — who would otherwise have been infected — were born HIV-free.

Additionally, the United States is the strongest supporter of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and was instrumental in its founding. We have continued to be the largest donor.

With the Millennium Challenge Account, the United States has launched the most innovative approach to foreign affairs in the last 50 years. We invest in those countries that are committed to ruling justly, investing in their people and encouraging

economic freedom. For the first year of that programme our Congress allocated $1 billion in funding. We selected 16 countries to be eligible to receive that assistance as they take steps to ensure a brighter future for their children. To truly protect and improve the lives of our children, we must each engage constructively in international partnerships, while taking concrete responsibility at home.

Our thanks and appreciation go again to UNICEF for helping coordinate this cause — and for the support it gives to parents, families, and communities around the world striving to provide their children with health, happiness, and opportunity. As our Secretary of State, Colin Powell, has said,

> "There is no element of our society more vulnerable than our children and there is no group of people who will have a more direct impact on our future. They are our future. This new century will be theirs, not ours."

Mr. Tan Kee Kwong (Malaysia): On behalf of the Malaysian delegation, I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his report, which contains the second update of the progress made in the follow-up to the special session of the General Assembly on children (A/59/274). We are pleased to join Mr. Kul Gautam, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, who introduced the report in the Third Committee on 18 October, in noting that Governments are taking substantive measures to pursue the goals aimed at creating "a world fit for children", as envisaged in the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the special session in May 2002.

It appears that rapid progress has been achieved in certain areas while setbacks have occurred in others. We note the Secretary-General's assessment that while many countries had taken concrete action in 2003 to translate the commitments made in 2002 into national action plans and policies, the overall rate of progress has been uneven.

The situation seems to be more encouraging now. We note especially that almost two thirds of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa have opted to integrate the goals of the special session into their poverty reduction strategies and that some 18 countries have adopted or intend to develop a national plan of action or policy paper on children.

My delegation remains sensitive to the fact that some 30,000 children lose their lives every day for preventable reasons. While there is a clear and genuine effort to strengthen partnerships within the international community to increase child survival and promote healthy lives, more surely needs to be done to achieve the targets set by the Millennium Development Goals in areas such as reducing infant and under-five mortality, increasing routine immunizations and supplies of vitamins for children, improving maternal health, reducing preventable diseases and providing greater access to safe drinking water. Similarly, greater efforts are required to promote the other goals set at the special session, namely providing quality education, protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence and combating HIV/AIDS.

Malaysia is pleased to participate in some of those efforts at the regional and multilateral levels. At the national level, many of our efforts have been carried out in the context of the second National Plan of Action for Children, encompassing the period 2001 to 2020. That Plan of Action was formulated in conformity with Malaysia's Vision 2020 strategy, the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the outcome document of the special session on children.

While the goals of "A world fit for children" (A/S-27/19/Rev.1) set a particular focus on four areas, ministers in the East Asia and Pacific region, during the Sixth East Asia and Pacific Ministerial Consultation on Children held in May 2003, identified education as the overarching imperative for the region. In addition, the ministers set four issues as regional priorities: action against commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking; fighting HIV/AIDS; improving nutrition; and reducing maternal and neonatal mortality. Malaysia feels that those are important areas that might merit consideration in other regions as well.

My delegation commends the invaluable support and commitment demonstrated by the relevant United Nations development agencies in gearing their activities to assist and support Member States in implementing the policies, plans and programmes proposed in the Plan of Action of the special session. We urge the relevant United Nations agencies to continue their efforts to assist developing countries to establish and strengthen their national capacity and institutions for the promotion and protection of the

rights of children. They could also explore the possibility of working in tandem with regional organizations, where appropriate, to assist Member States achieve the goals set by the special session.

Malaysia has consistently made a conscious decision to set education as the cornerstone of the national agenda. That commitment is underscored by the fact that 20.6 per cent of the total development allocation under the Eighth Malaysia Plan, covering the period 2001-2005, is allocated to education. In the budget presented by the Government to Parliament recently, the largest allocation is for the education sector, accounting for almost one quarter of total operating allocations.

Malaysia's national education policy is geared towards providing basic education for a minimum of nine years. There is equal access to educational opportunities for both boys and girls, with the rate of enrolment between the two genders being almost at par — or 50.4 per cent boys and 49.6 per cent girls — except at the tertiary level where there is higher enrolment by girls as compared with boys. Having put in place educational facilities throughout the country for the disabled, the Government has now made primary education compulsory for all.

With a 98 per cent rate of enrolment in primary school, the Government has now moved a step further — by embarking on the provision of quality education to ensure that children have access to the best learning system so that they will be able to cope with the rapid progress of the information age. Efforts undertaken in that regard include modernizing schools, ensuring that teachers are well-trained and equipping all schools with computer laboratories and information and communications technology equipment.

A sum of RM 5.5 billion has been allocated under the Eighth Malaysia Plan to further develop the health sector. Malaysia is constantly upgrading its medical facilities and programmes. There has been a steady decline in maternal and neonatal mortality in Malaysia, which currently stand at 0.2 per 1,000 pregnancies and 5 per 1,000 live births, respectively. Health and community clinics set up throughout the country provide services such as immunization and normal development assessment for children and ensure that our children enjoy optimal health.

Malaysia has become committed to the concept of total rehabilitation for disabled children since it was first highlighted in 1979 during an Asian conference for the handicapped. Total rehabilitation entails a multidisciplinary approach: rehabilitative services for disabled children are provided by the Department of Social Welfare through institutional services, with the Ministry of Health providing technical input. The Department has also forged smart partnerships with non-governmental organizations by supporting them financially in the administration and management of the institutional centres they operate.

Turning to the issue of protecting children from abuse, exploitation and violence, the Child Act 2001, formulated in line with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, sets out provisions for the care and protection of children in Malaysia. A Court for Children has been established, which allows the child concerned to participate in discussions and deliberations in court. In the area of child abuse, Malaysia has developed mechanisms for child protection, care and rehabilitation through the setting-up of intersectoral teams at district and state hospitals to deal with suspected child abuse and neglect. A milestone in preventive measures is the establishment of child protection teams, which set out multiple programmes run by the community for the community. Among other things, they conduct parental education activities and serve as counselling centres.

While having identified action against commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking in children as the first of the four regional priorities for child protection, Malaysia is mindful that that challenge cannot be surmounted by any one country acting alone. Malaysia subscribes to the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Declaration on the Commitments for Children in ASEAN adopted in 2001, the first document fully dedicated to ASEAN children in this millennium. Under that Declaration, ASEAN has drawn up cooperation programmes to combat child-trafficking and intercountry adoption. At the same time, programmes have been put in place to provide alternative family-care arrangements for the victims of child abuse, neglect and exploitation, as well as to address the special needs of children with disabilities.

Recognizing the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS, which poses serious health and developmental challenges to humankind and which disproportionately affects the young, Malaysia participated actively at the Association of Southeast

Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit on HIV/AIDS convened in Brunei Darussalam in November 2001 in conjunction with the 7th ASEAN Summit. The objective was to give the issue of HIV/AIDS the highest priority on the political agenda of the ASEAN countries and to make a commitment to cooperate on intercountry and cross-border issues, as well as to exchange technical expertise and experiences in order to address the HIV/AIDS problem. On the home front, Malaysia continues to give very serious attention to measures to combat HIV/AIDS, though the reported cases of HIV infection are relatively small compared to our overall population. The Government has taken a comprehensive and integrated approach to dealing with this problem, which includes preventive measures, care, support and treatment for those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. The Government works closely with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in this regard, in particular the Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC), an umbrella organization headed by Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir.

Malaysia's Vision 2020, which sets out the direction for the country's development and progress over the next two decades, envisages that every child born should be brought up in a healthy environment, provided with all necessary protection against diseases, receive proper nurturing, care and affection, receive general and higher education as far as possible, receive appropriate skills in necessary fields, and be imbued with cultural and human values. We are confident that the well-being of children and women are reliable indicators of a healthy society and of good governance. Therefore, the Malaysian Government will continue to promote and facilitate the rights of the child, especially in the areas of protection, development and participation.

Ms. Espíndola (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all allow me to thank the Secretary-General for his report on progress made in follow-up to the commitments that appear in the outcome document of the twenty-seventh special session of the Assembly held in May 2002.

At that session, the delegations of 190 countries approved a declaration and a plan of action entitled, "A World Fit for Children", whereby their Governments undertook to achieve a set of objectives in a specific time frame designed to enhance living conditions for children and young people, with particular attention given to promoting healthy lives; providing quality education; protecting children from abuse, exploitation and violence and combating HIV/AIDS. The special session served to empower and motivate each country with a view to continuing to pursue actions and processes of change to benefit boys, girls and adolescents. In that regard, we are gratified to see the progress that has been made in achieving the proposed goals, as well as the widespread support that those goals have received from Governments and international agencies.

All of us, as countries, need to direct our efforts towards meeting basic needs so that children can enjoy healthy lives and a prosperous future. In order to achieve that objective, it is vital for us to make the shift from words to the execution of plans and projects so as to create a world that gives them the security and protection they need. The limited available resources to fund programmes intended to care for children and adolescents; inequalities in social, economic and political conditions; discrimination based on race or gender; the allocation of funds for arms purchases instead of for bolstering children's programmes; armed conflicts; lack of housing; the degradation of the global environment; an increase in the incidence of diseases, including those which were thought to have been eradicated; hunger; malnutrition; lack of educational opportunities and family breakdown — these are pressing problems that require urgent resolution and represent a challenge to the Governments of the world.

Ecuador reaffirms its commitment to the principles articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Millennium Development Goals, and the targets set at the special session of the General Assembly in 2002. Pursuant to those mandates and mindful of the importance of giving priority attention to young children and infants, Ecuador has effectuated a set of policies intended to protect the rights of children and meet their needs.

My country has striven hard to increase investment in the social sphere, particularly that intended to meet the needs of children. However, the grave economic crisis occurring in the country and the burden of external debt, which represents more than 40 per cent of the national budget, have limited the development of the Ecuadorian people.

In the legislative sphere, the political constitution establishes a new social and legal status for boy and girl children designed to give effect to their rights as

citizens and affirm the principle of the superior interests of the child, which dictates that their rights shall prevail over those of others. The new code for children and adolescents adopted in Ecuador is the outcome of a broad-ranging process in which civil society and public and private institutions throughout the country took part. That instrument took as its premise the concept of all rights for all children and is a clear token of the deep national commitment to meeting the needs of boy and girl children and adolescents in Ecuador on a priority and urgent basis.

We believe that it is time to face up to the responsibility of finding the right mechanisms that will enable us fully to execute the international commitments adopted for children. However, the necessary social investment is very often undermined by critical economic conditions, which severely affect the most vulnerable social groups and frustrate developing countries trying to achieve the target of devoting at least 20 per cent of their national budgetary resources to basic social services. Accordingly, we need to find ways and means of establishing lasting external solutions to this problem, since without the vital resources, it will be very difficult to counter the deterioration in the quality of life of our children and adolescents.

My delegation believes that initiatives such as those agreed to in the Millennium Declaration, Agenda 21 and the Monterrey and Johannesburg Summits are of key importance. Such actions will help to enhance the living conditions for the most affected sectors, so that children can enjoy an environment that will allow them to develop in all respects and to be fully integrated into society.

Mr. Swe (Myanmar): I wish first of all to thank the Secretary-General for preparing the second report on the follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children for our deliberation.

It has been two years since we, the international community, adopted the Declaration and Plan of Action and pledged to our children that we would build a world fit for them. We have also set time-bound goals, with particular focus on four areas. And today, for the second time, we are reviewing those promises that we have made to the children of the world.

The Secretary-General reports that since the special session on children, 25 countries have completed national plans of action for children and many more have national plans under formulation. Many countries have incorporated the goals and commitments of "A World Fit for Children" into other national policy and planning instruments.

The set of goals adopted at the special session complements and reinforces the Millennium Development Goals. Like many Member States, Myanmar is striving to achieve both sets of goals. To reinforce its efforts to create an environment that allows children to achieve their full potential, Myanmar acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, promulgated the Child Law in 1993 and subsequently adopted the rules of the Child Law. The Government of Myanmar has also established a national programme of action for the promotion, protection and development of children.

We are heartened that three quarters of the world's children receive routine immunizations and that this has averted an estimated 2.5 million deaths per year. Yet, we are shocked to learn that 1.4 million children under five years of age die annually from vaccine-preventable diseases. In Myanmar, the Government has successfully carried out immunization activities throughout the length and breadth of the country. Full immunization coverage for all infants and pregnant women against tetanus has been achieved since 1990, and over 90 per cent of Myanmar's children under the age of five have been immunized with polio vaccine. In February 2003, Myanmar was able to declare the eradication of polio in the country.

The Secretary-General reports that the world remains on track to reach the international target for safe drinking water. In Myanmar, in 2000 the Government launched a project to reduce by half the number of people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities by 2015 and to achieve universal access to safe water and sanitation facilities by 2025.

The Secretary-General estimates that globally there are from 104 million to more than 120 million school children of primary age range. Education is an essential tool for every child. There is an old Myanmar proverb that says that education is the pot of gold that no one can steal. The Government of Myanmar places great importance on providing quality education for all children. In the past six years, 135 tertiary education institutions and more than 400 primary and secondary schools were established, 90 per cent them in rural

areas. The primary school attendance rate was 95 per cent in the 2003-2004 academic year and, according to figures collected across the nation for the current academic year, nearly 100 per cent of school-age children now attend school.

To prevent and protect children from sexual exploitation, abuse and trafficking, the National Committee for the Rights of the Child works closely with the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs, the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation, the Committee for Trafficking in Persons and national and international non-governmental organizations. As a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Myanmar has submitted its second periodic report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. In its concluding remarks, the Committee acknowledged that there have been many positive developments in Myanmar relating to children. Another major milestone in Myanmar's efforts to prevent and protect children is its accession in March 2004 to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and all its protocols.

In many cases, Myanmar has set national standards higher than its international obligations. A case in point is recruitment into the armed forces. Enlistment in the Myanmar Armed Forces is voluntary, and the minimum age for enlisting is 18 years. It is against the law for anyone under the age of 18 to enlist. To ensure that no adolescent falls through any procedural loophole, a committee for the prevention of the military recruitment of underage children was recently established and a national plan of action has been put in place.

We have also been successfully carrying out a process of national reconciliation in Myanmar. As a first step for our transition to democracy, a national convention, which has successfully held its first session, was able to bring together representatives from all strata of society, representatives of the various national groups of Myanmar and representatives of 17 major armed groups and 17 smaller armed groups. Those developments will greatly benefit our children and future generations. A peaceful, stable, democratic Myanmar is an integral part of the promise we give to our children.

The Secretary-General reports that over 2 million children under the age of 15 are infected with the HIV virus and that the face of HIV/AIDS is young and female. The report also mentions that where HIV/AIDS is declining, it is primarily because young people have learned to practice safe behaviour. Myanmar places great importance on educating our children. Its school-based Healthy Life Skills HIV/AIDS Prevention Education project (SHAPE), as part of the national curriculum, is taught to primary, middle and high school students. Its success has led to the expansion of SHAPE to SHAPE PLUS, a programme that reaches out to key groups outside of the formal education system. Myanmar also mobilizes civil society in its fight against HIV/AIDS. Our national non-governmental organizations and international non-governmental organizations play an integral role in our fight against HIV/AIDS. We thank them for their valuable efforts. Our gratitude also goes to the relevant United Nations agencies for providing us with important and valuable support.

While recognizing that the challenges we face to build a world fit for children are indeed daunting, I conclude by reiterating our strong and firm commitment to that cause. We owe it to our future leaders — our children.

Mr. Shiweva (Namibia): My delegation expresses its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report before the Assembly on the follow-up to the United Nations special session on children, contained in document A/59/274.

The Secretary-General's report indicates that overall global trends show that many countries have taken concrete steps to translate the commitments made at the special session into national action plans for children. That is indeed a very encouraging development.

However, it is important to point out that different regions have pursued the follow-up to the special session on children at different speeds. For instance, while almost all countries in some regions have completed their plans of action for children, others, especially in the sub-Saharan region, are still in the process of complementing their poverty reduction plans with specific policies and are developing national action plans on children. During the major event next year, we will once again have the opportunity to take stock of the progress made in the implementation of the commitments made at the special session of the General Assembly.

The Namibian Government views investing in children as consistent with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as most of the MDGs directly affect children's future. In this connection, my Government adopted the National Programme of Action on Children in 1991, and made it part and parcel of the overall socio-economic development strategy of the country. Our Government seeks to promote poverty reduction through stimulating economic growth, investing in social sectors and funding social safety nets. We maintain a social safety net for vulnerable groups such as the elderly, orphans and persons with disabilities.

The Namibian Government recognizes that quality education directly contributes to human capacity and productivity. Our Government's commitment to education is reflected in the large amount of financial resources allocated to education every year. We spent approximately 25 per cent of the national budget on education.

The Namibian Government has made great progress in making education effective, compulsory and accessible to all. In that connection, we have an early childhood policy that encompasses children up to eight years of age, starting with prenatal care for the mother. This policy was developed to streamline the delivery of health, nutrition and educational services in order to improve children's survival and ability to thrive. Furthermore, primary school enrolment rates in Namibia are higher for girls than for boys.

Despite improvements in access to education, the school dropout rate as a result of HIV/AIDS, poverty and hunger are a cause for concern. The other challenge for our Government is the provision of quality education for our marginalized groups and those living under extreme poverty. Access to primary education for those groups is limited by various factors, including the availability of schools within reasonable proximity, the required contributions to the school development fund and normal costs associated with attending schools.

A combination of recurrent droughts, food insecurity, the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and poverty is severely affecting our human development. The HIV/AIDS epidemic is considered to be the single greatest threat to sustainable human development and the effort to meet the MDGs. About one in five pregnant women are infected with HIV and the devastating effects are felt everywhere, especially among our children. The epidemic has already reduced the average lifespan of a newborn Namibian by more than a decade and has resulted in a growing number of orphans and other vulnerable children.

Extended family networks have always supported orphans and other vulnerable children. However, the scourge of HIV/AIDS is making it increasingly difficult for families to cope with the growing number of orphans and other vulnerable children. This is particularly true in the light of the fact that older persons are increasingly bearing the responsibility of caring for orphans.

The Namibian Government, in realizing the impending problem and wishing to ensure a coordinated approach to the growing number of orphans and other vulnerable children, has adopted a five-year strategic plan for the period from 2001 to 2006 and the National Policy on orphans and vulnerable children. These initiatives provide a framework for protecting and promoting the well-being of orphans and other vulnerable children.

In this connection, we wish to encourage all those States that have not yet done so to put national strategies in place for the protection and care of orphans and vulnerable children. We also concur with the Secretary-General that support for orphans and vulnerable children is reaching only limited numbers of these children and there is a great need to expand the scope of this support to help guide and accelerate response.

In an effort to reduce child mortality, primary healthcare delivery structures have been put in place in Namibia. These include the following: prevention and management of diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria; our Expanded Programme on Immunization; programmes on the control of diarrhoea and diseases and the control of acute respiratory infections; and the promotion of nutrition.

Although the mortality rate for infants and children under five years old has been reduced by an average of 2.5 and 2 per cent annually, it still remains high in rural areas. The main causes for mortality in children are diarrhoea, malaria, pneumonia, malnutrition and HIV/AIDS. The rapid spread of HIV/AIDS undermines the preventive efforts of the Government to reduce diarrhoea and pneumonia-related deaths in children.

Finally, our Government is continuously searching for innovative and creative approaches aimed at addressing the problems facing our children and building on the progress we have already made. Hence, international cooperation is needed to augment these efforts.

Ms. Tincopa (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child was a milestone that required Governments to set priorities for the promotion and protection of the rights of children and to invest in their development. That framework was expanded by the outcome documents of conferences, summits and special sessions held since 1990. The 2002 special session of the General Assembly on children is of particular importance, since it allowed the international community to renew its political commitment to children and adolescents by establishing a set of priorities, including promoting healthy lives, providing quality education, protecting children from abuse, exploitation and violence and combating HIV/AIDS.

Peru regards the well-being of girls, boys and adolescents as a key objective of development. In this regard, we recognize that they possess rights that the State is obliged to guarantee. As a result, we have a strategic agenda of action that gives priority to eradicating poverty and reducing social inequities by implementing comprehensive policies and mechanisms designed to guarantee children's economic, social and political opportunities. This is established in the long-term policies of the National Agreement and the National Plan to overcome poverty, which gives priority to the development of human capacities, in particular regarding comprehensive protection for children, especially in the first three years of life. This was also endorsed in the short-term economic, social and political commitment of our National Agreement, which calls for healthy lives for children under five years old, giving preference to those under three years old.

In this regard, Peru has set in motion the National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents for the period from 2002 to 2010, a document that was prepared in consultation with more than 200 State and civil society institutions, which sets forth the actions, programmes and strategies that need to be followed in order to ensure respect for the rights of children and adolescents throughout their lives.

That plan is based on two convictions: that equal opportunity should start with children and adolescents and that quality of life and the full development of the individual are prerequisites for the exercise and applicability of rights. Thus, the key goal of our Plan of Action is to achieve structural changes in the situation of children and adolescents in Peru, whose reality continues to be characterized by inequality and social disparities: 66.2 per cent of children under four years of age live in poverty, and 22.4 per cent in extreme poverty.

Those conditions often have a negative impact on children and adolescents, in many cases leading them to a premature entry into the labour market, where they face abandonment, economic and sexual exploitation, unwanted and early pregnancies, drug addiction, alcoholism and sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

To confront that harsh reality, the Government of Peru has made the fight against poverty and the reduction of social inequality one of its top priorities, and it has been working to that end in the areas of health, education and participation.

With respect to health, the Government is working to ensure universal access to health care, including the right to free, quality sexual and reproductive health care on an ongoing basis, with the priority going to areas of greatest poverty and the most vulnerable sectors of the population. Special attention is given to the cases of children and adolescents with HIV/AIDS.

The Government is promoting education as the central element in its fight against poverty, ensuring universal and unrestricted access to comprehensive education ranging from the most basic level to vocational training. That education is free and of good quality, and it promotes equality, strengthens democratic values and prepares citizens for an active integration into social life.

As to participation, the Government is promoting the participation of children and adolescents, making them strategic actors in the country's development. That action seeks to counter problems such as youth gangs and alcohol and drug abuse, among others.

I wish to refer to the difficult situation of thousands of children in the world who are recruited as soldiers, sexually exploited, subject to the worst forms

of child labour and exposed to abuse, discrimination and violence. As stated in the report of the Secretary-General (A/59/274), the Millennium Development Goals do not explicitly include objectives concerning the protection of children. That makes it necessary for Governments to treat children as a priority in their national planning.

In that context, Peru calls on the States of the international community and civil society to work together to ensure that children and adolescents have full enjoyment of their rights. We note with satisfaction that the question of the rights of the child is incorporated into the work of the relevant United Nations bodies such as UNICEF, the International Labour Organization and UNESCO, among others.

To conclude, although Peru has made progress in carrying out its commitments on the rights of children and adolescents, much remains to be done to ensure their full development. Peru reaffirms its commitment to children and adolescents and will continue working because they constitute the most important human and social element. We have a responsibility and a present and future obligation to them and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.